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Governor   Public Advocate

For Immediate Release: Contact:
June 5, 2009   Laurie Brewer
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Former School Counselor Empowers Nursing Home Residents through Volunteering

Haddonfield Volunteer among those honored today by Public Advocate Ronald K. Chen

After a career of working with young people, **Haddonfield resident Ann Herrmann-Sauer** has spent her retirement advocating for a much older crowd.

As a Volunteer Advocate for the New Jersey Ombudsman for the Institutionalized Elderly, she spends a minimum of four hours a week at **the Lakewood of Voorhees Nursing Home, in Voorhees**, empowering residents and helping to ensure the best quality of care possible.

As a Volunteer Advocate, Herrmann-Sauer acts on behalf of Elder Ombudsman Debra Branch, whose office investigates allegations of abuse or neglect in the state's 1,155 assisted living facilities, nursing homes and other adult long-term care facilities.

Herrmann-Sauer was among approximately 150 Volunteer Advocates honored by Public Advocate Ronald K. Chen at a June 3 ceremony in Hamilton Township, Mercer County, honoring the individuals who work with the Ombudsman to ensure the safety and security of vulnerable elderly residents.

"These volunteers are an integral part of the safety net that supports and protects vulnerable elderly people throughout this state," said Chen. "We can't thank them enough for the important service they provide."

Volunteer Advocates visit elder residents regularly and keep an eye on quality of care issues, help resolve problems and provide companionship for elderly residents.

Herrmann-Sauer says it is not much different from her past jobs as teacher, counselor, and guidance supervisor for grades K-12. "I advocated for my students as well as for my department," she said. She says it just comes naturally for her to encourage people and become their advocate.

Ann says the most powerful tool for the Volunteer Advocates is the assurance that "we advocate on behalf of the state." Any suspected cases of abuse or neglect must be reported directly to the NJ Office of the Ombudsman for the Institutionalized Elderly under the Department of the Public Advocate.

A volunteer for five years, Herrmann-Sauer said it is important to establish a good rapport with staff and residents and to follow up on issues in a timely manner.

She notes the appreciation the residents have when volunteers offer their time in the nursing homes. "They are happy to have people listen and pay attention when they talk," she said.

On a typical day, Herrmann-Sauer makes her rounds, starting with the lunchroom. After she has talked with everyone inside, she heads to bed-bound residents. Then, she greets the remaining nursing home dwellers. Her goal for her 200-250 residents is to "get them the things they need."

Herrmann-Sauer talks with a variety of residents in the nursing home, from all walks of life and spanning a wide range of ages.

The residents communicate with her in the best way they can. For the ones who can't talk because of stroke, they write or use hand signals- a wave or a thumbs-up when she asks them how they are doing, and keeps them company. She runs into issues ranging from television static to comforting those who have just lost loved ones.

For Herrmann-Sauer it is the sense of purpose that keeps her coming back each year. "You are doing something for someone else that makes a difference," she said.

The success of the Volunteer Advocate Program is predicated on the dedication and devotion of citizens in New Jersey who willingly give back to their communities, and their ability to effectively resolve issues on behalf of the population we serve. Volunteers must complete a 32 hour training program to become a certified Ombudsman Advocate.

If you are interested in becoming a volunteer advocate, please contact Joann Cancel at 609-943-4022 or via email at joann.cancel@advocate.state.nj.us.